

Partnership Initial Teacher Education: building capacity and quality

Theme: Social Justice

Sub-theme: Scaling up Quality Education for All

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Introduction:

The aim of this paper is to explore ways in which the school-based component of initial teacher education (ITE) and early professional development (EPD) can improve the quality of student teachers' learning and simultaneously build teaching and learning capability in schools. More specifically, it seeks to develop new knowledge and understanding about teacher education partnerships and improve the quality of school-based teacher education, including the use of appropriate technologies. The research draws primarily on an ESRC-TLRP funded study (2006-2009) which i) assessed the effectiveness of the school-based element of ITE, ii) the partnership arrangements and iii) the use of a range of meta-cognitive methodologies for using virtual learning environments for enhancing pedagogy and strengthening student teachers' learning. The project involved a study of a cohort of 40 student teachers, selected using random sampling, and tracked through ITE, Induction and EPD over a three year period. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of personnel who supported all three phases of teacher education. The study also draws on experience from working in partnership with four African Universities in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda.

The model of teacher education in Northern Ireland (NI), which was introduced in 1996, shares many of the characteristics of teacher education around the world. It is based on a competence framework, is predominantly school-based and comprises a three phase continuum. At the initial phase, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are the lead partners, during induction the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) occupy the lead role and during Early Professional Development (EPD) the schools. There was an expectation also that each of the partners would contribute in an integrated way across each phase of the continuum. These arrangements were spelt out in detail in a *Teacher Education Partnership Handbook* (TEPH) (DENI, 1998) which provided guidance and a common, shared approach to the provision of support for student and beginning teachers. Unlike other UK jurisdictions, partnerships with schools in NI are voluntary, formal mentoring arrangements do not exist and no resources transfer to schools. A further review of teacher education, which began in 2003, has recently reported (June, 2010) and a consultation document has just been issued (DE & DEL, June 2010).

At the University of Ulster teacher education is offered entirely at postgraduate level and most students are from Northern Ireland (NI). Students on the primary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course spend approximately 50% of their time in schools and the other 50% at the University (38 weeks in total), while the PGCE post primary students spend two thirds of their time (36 weeks in total) in schools (24 weeks) and one third at the University (12 weeks).

Nature and Characteristics of Partnership Arrangements

One of the most acclaimed examples of teacher education partnerships in the UK was the Oxford Internship Scheme (OIS) which was based on a sustained critical dialogue between the different kinds of expertise which teachers and university lecturers could offer in equal quantities to ITE (Benton, 1990 and McIntyre 1997). In particular, the discredited theory into practice rationale was replaced by a practical, theorizing rationale, in which good ideas from theory and research, and equally from teachers' practice, were to be critically considered (Pendry & McIntyre, 1996). Interns were encouraged to learn from well-conceived good practice and to develop the skills of practical theorizing about their own teaching. The OIS demonstrated student teachers and teachers in schools could interact powerfully with the development of the whole school, with each having something to contribute to the professional development of the other (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). However, more recently, Ellis (2010), in providing a critique of the Oxford Internship Scheme (OIS), contends that school experience merely provides an opportunity to become acculturated to the existing practices of the

school setting, suggesting an emphasis on the reproduction of routinised behaviour of teaching. She describes this as an 'impoverished understanding of experience' (Ellis, 2010).

Believing in the need to shift the focus of ITE from HEIs to schools and to develop pedagogy within a context of applied professional knowledge, Goodson (2003) underlines the need to bring the "theories of context" and the "stories of action" in schools together when developing teachers' professional knowledge, without one taking precedence over the other (Goodson, 2003, 48). Edwards (2005), too, advocates that teacher educators in higher education should begin to work 'relationally', referring to the idea of distributed expertise (Edwards, 2005). In a similar way Gomes- Casseres (1997) extends this concept to one of broadening partnerships, when he speaks of cultivating 'new constellations of allies', agreeing that different kinds of networks and network roles are important in knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (Gomes- Casseres 1997). The prime goal in teacher education is to cultivate a continuing search for understanding and meaning (Senge, 1992) and to problematize the relationship between learning and teaching, pursuing the connections with aggressive curiosity and healthy scepticism (Warren- Little, 1993). Spillane's work on distributed leadership makes reference to the collective cognitive properties of a group working together, believing that the sum is greater than any one individual's practice 'one has to move beyond an analysis of individual knowledge and consider what these individuals know and do together' (Spillane et al, 2001, 12).

A great deal of Shulman's (1986) work was concerned to emphasize the importance of teacher knowledge, including their philosophical and historical bases. 'Subject matter or content knowledge is the set of fundamental assumptions, definitions, concepts and procedures that constitute the ideas to be learned. Pedagogical content knowledge includes useful forms of representation of those ideas, powerful analogies, examples and explanations of a subject, insights into what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult and the conceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of the topic. Curricular knowledge involves understanding how the topics are arranged over time across schooling experience' (Tatto et al, 2008). This typography exemplifies the multi-dimensional nature of teacher knowledge and highlights the importance of pedagogical content knowledge, concentrating as it does on the contrast between expert teachers thinking and practice.

There is clearly an emerging consensus that much of what teachers need to learn must be learned in and from practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Numerous studies have demonstrated for many years the barriers to student learning associated with the traditionally planned model of teaching practice. 'Often the clinical side of teacher education has been fairly haphazard, depending on the idiosyncrasies of loosely selected placements with little guidance about what happens in them and little connection to University work ' (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 40). Cochran Smith and Lytle (1999) advocate an inquiry as stance perspective in terms of how inquiry produces knowledge, how enquiry relates to practice and what teachers learn from inquiries within communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 250). The knowledge *for* practice perspective assumes that teachers who know more will teach better. The knowledge *in* practice conception assumes teacher knowledge is expressed in artistry of practice, reflection and narratives, given the way in which professional knowledge is situated, social and rooted in the uncertainty of a professional practice. The knowledge *of* practice distinction questions the formal practical knowledge distinction in terms of the origin of and power associated with adherence to the distinction. 'The basis of this knowledge-practice conception is that teachers across the professional life span, play a central role in generating knowledge of practice by making their classrooms and schools sites for inquiry, connecting their work in schools to larger issues, and taking a critical perspective on the theory and research of others' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 273).

Lave and Wenger (1991) describe their perspective on the situated and social nature of knowledge and learning: '... the concept of situated activity ... the relational character of knowledge and learning, about the negotiated character of meaning and the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of the learning activity for the people involved ... the view that agent, activity and world materially constitute each other' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 33). This definition allows us to begin to move away from a simple separation of knowledge about and knowledge how when we think of learning to teach. Lave and Wenger use the term 'legitimate peripheral participation' as a way of looking at initial or apprenticeship learning and as an important stage in the induction of learners into confident and competent practice. Teaching within a community of practice involves all participants as learners while at the same time contributing to shaping the understandings that operate within the community (Lave, 1988).

Towards a Model

Maandag et al (2007) provide a useful framework for characterising university-school partnerships. Based on a five country cross national study (England, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden) they describe how these partnerships vary along a continuum from the school playing a host role (work placement model) to one where there is shared responsibility between the school and the HEI (partner model), to the school providing the entire training (training school model). In the training school model, the entire training course is provided by the school. The HEI function focuses on training the trainers at school and developing teaching and training methods, including the knowledge and skills to undertake coaching.

The influential McKinsey Report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) in examining factors which contributed to the achievements of the world's best performing school systems, concluded that the quality of a school system depends on the quality of its teachers (Executive Summary, 2007,16). 'The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction (Executive Summary, 2007, 26). Four broad approaches to assist teachers to improve instruction were identified. These were: building practical skills during initial training; placing coaches in schools to support teachers; selecting and developing effective instructional leaders; and enabling teachers to learn from each other. Inherent in all the high achieving countries internationally is the priority given to teachers' learning and the knowledge they create. Creating professional knowledge that comes from teachers is the starting point for professional development. Another associated characteristic is the training school model which seeks to develop state-of-the-art practice and train novices in the classroom of expert teachers. Candidates learn in all parts of the school, receive frequent and sustained supervision and feedback and participate in school planning and decision making. An extended internship or residency model of teacher education is a feature of a \$100 million federal stimulus package in the Obama administration in the USA.

Using Technologies to Enhance Professional Learning

Multimedia technologies allow teachers to work in new ways with access to camcorders, video-editing software, computers and interactive whiteboards. The interconnected user-generated use of Web2.0 has yet to reach the realm of professional learning, yet many teachers keep blogs of their practice, create video podcasts of their students' performance and integrate technology into their pedagogy. The emerging field of *technological pedagogical content knowledge* (Mishra & Kochler, 2006) articulates ways in which technology can be deployed in powerful services of teaching and learning. Case-based teaching can convey the rich and complex nature of teaching in context. It also provides an alternative approach for creating meaningful settings for teacher learning (Sykes and Bird, 1992; Doyle, 1990).

Clarke (2002, 2008) in examining how virtual learning environments can support the development of professional communities of practice in ITE found productive formal (supported by tutors and course requirements) and informal "mutual engagement" around shared professional "domains". Students worked to co-construct components of their own curriculum, a "shared repertoire" of professional support (Wenger, 1998 and www.ewenger.com). The availability of local virtual learning environments, provide a widely accessible, practical locus for professional learning which embeds boundary-crossing continuity across the phases of teacher education, and provides access to expertise within and beyond the profession (Clarke, 2009). Challenges, such as the substantial opportunity and economic costs attached to updating complex online tools to keep pace with those on increasingly sophisticated social networking sites like Bebo and MySpace, are worth noting. Additionally, the need for continuity of access for teachers throughout their careers must be reconciled with the imperative to maintain secure and safe online environments for pupils in schools. McNair and Marshall (2007) promote the potential of using e-portfolios to support and evidence professional learning. These online affordances can present distinct advantages in dealing with the geographical realities of partnerships, and young teachers undoubtedly have the skills to capitalise on these opportunities once barriers are removed.

Mobile phones are widespread especially in communities that surround the cities of developing countries where conventional fixed line telephony has never existed (Townsend, 2000). The adoption of mobile technologies in Africa is one of the highest globally and most governments have now identified ICT as a national priority for educational purposes. If widespread connectivity is achieved then the potential of new wireless technologies, combined with the expansion of mobile equipment is such that educators must be in a position to use it to transform both teacher education and pupil learning in schools (Jordan, 2005). Early

research evidence has illustrated the rich social interaction and enhanced motivation for learners (Mandryk et al, 2001). Dhararajan (2001) asserts that if applied with thought, extreme sensitivity, and based on sound pedagogical principles, information and communication technologies can afford the means to extend access to education and training to the knowledge poor and especially the isolated. With the number of mobile devices predicted to surpass the number of conventional computers and with band with for mobile devices predicted to increase dramatically, mobile e-learning has a crucial role in the future. In respect of teacher education, self-produced videos, made with a digital video camera and viewed on handheld mobile computers, can enhance peer learning and tutor- student support, as well as being used for mentoring.

All teachers need opportunities to participate in professional communities in which new resources and pedagogies are discussed, if practice is to be progressed and transformed. The notion of distributed cognition suggests that when diverse groups of teachers with different kinds of knowledge and expertise come together in discourse communities, it can result in rich conversations and new insights into teaching and learning. Existing cultures in many schools, however, do not value or support critical and reflective examination of teaching practice.

Findings from the ESRC TLRP Project

The voluntary nature of partnerships in NI has posed difficulties for teacher education. While the specially prepared Teacher Education Partnership Handbook (TEPH) set out respective roles and responsibilities for the partners, these did not include any discussion of what the school-based curriculum might entail. The language was expressed perfunctorily with schools being described as 'best placed to provide' or 'undertake the following activities'. The model of partnership was described as complementary rather than collaborative which ignored opportunities for reciprocal learning within the partnership. 'When partnership is devoid of underpinning epistemological and pedagogical issues ... it flattens the complexity and reduces teacher education to technical rationalist tasks (Furlong et al., 2006, p.34).

Respondents were critical of the lack of HEI involvement during the induction and EPD phases and of the associated implications for continuity and progression in new teachers' professional learning. Some schools lacked a culture of support for beginning teachers and there was an inadequacy in, or absence of, classroom observation.

The Career Entry Profile, designed to act as a bridge between ITE and induction, was deemed not to be functioning effectively. There was overlap in content between ITE and the induction phase and the support given was often repetitive.

VLEs were making an important contribution to knowledge creation and sharing among students and their tutors resulting in enhanced formal and informal learning.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in their report on teacher education in 1999 (ETI, 1999) identified the need to strengthen partnership arrangements suggesting that schools should be a key partner in professional development at all phases. While relationships across the partners were praised, some inherent tensions across the partners were identified.

Conclusion

'Policy churns dramatically, creating the appearance of major changes while deep below the surface, life goes on largely uninterrupted' (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, 32). The review of teacher education in NI provides a timely, critical opportunity for those involved in teacher education to respond creatively to the consultation process. 'Teaching needs to be based on the development of a pedagogic discourse that arises from teachers sharing and scrutinizing practices and the kinds of knowledge which they build and the values in which these are rooted. The issue is not about theorising about practice' (Pollard, 2010, 6). While the proposals undoubtedly contain strengths, the language of partnership remains diluted, individualistic and HEI dominated. Relationships which are mutually beneficial and mutually interdependent and where the importance of knowledge generated through both research and practice is recognized, valued and shared, can lead to enhanced professional learning for all with beginning teachers acting as catalysts for learning for all teachers.

Neither schools nor HEIs have truly considered the developmental potential inherent in partnerships (Goodson, 2003), with opportunities for situated reciprocal professional learning being either compromised or forfeited. Student teachers are merely one of several sets of learners in a 'learning school', in which ideas are tested and contested and meanings negotiated in dialogue about practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Professional learning is intentional and capable of motivating and sustaining teachers, predicated on sharing and learning from their own and others practices. As technology gathers pace opportunities for professional learning, using multimedia, can illustrate ways in which the complexities of learning to teach can be supported across a range of contexts.

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